

Asoka: The pioneer of heritage in public diplomacy as soft power through the Dhammayattas

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Buddhism holds its roots in the heart of the Indian subcontinent. Lord Buddha, born in Lumbini travelled extensively throughout modern day Bihar, UP and Nepal; his meditations and preaching forming the pillars around which the Buddhist thought and lifestyle emerged. The Buddhist philosophy explicates the mysteries of the universe and life through the teachings of Buddha, relying on sensory perceptions and avoiding assumptive thought. The two major schools in the world today, the *Mahayana* and *Theravada*, derive from the various sub-sects under *Mahāsāṃghika* and the *Sthaviravāda*, the branches that Buddhism split into during the reign of King Ashok. Buddhism spread rapidly during this era, traversing across Central Asia towards Europe on one end and across the Himalayas into Southeast Asia on the other. Hence, while a lot of the ‘practiced heritage’ today lies in South and Southeast Asia, parts of India still carry the heritage forward.

In India, pilgrimage sites are spread all across the country, from Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh to Tamil Nadu and from the western states of Gujarat and Maharashtra to the easternmost tip of Arunachal Pradesh. When retracing Buddha’s actual footsteps, since a large part of North India is a major USP, a lot of later development in Buddhist philosophy, art and architecture also took place on Indian shores. Thus, it must be noted that apart from these major destinations, there are numerous other excavations and discoveries that reveal the vast extent of Buddhist heritage in the country.

Asoka was a great king who had contributed numerable sizeable noble virtues by spreading the Buddhism among human beings in his territory to set up the morality for making lasting peaceable and harmonious society in the Buddhist way. If we investigate historical evidences on the discovering Asoka’s rock edicts, certainly we can locate the magnitude works of his contributions in spreading the nonviolence, love, truth and tolerance. It is certainly significant all over the world. King Asoka was born in 304 B.C. at *Pataliputta* and was once a prince of the Mauryan dynasty. In this study, the predominant purpose is to describe the contributions towards Buddhism that he dedicated after conversion into Buddhism. Conclusively, the focus will be on “Asoka: the Pioneer of Heritage in Public Diplomacy as Soft Power through the Dhammayatras”

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